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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, May 6, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "BUILT-INS." Information and suggestions from the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Today I'm starting with a true story about a cheerful, cooperative family I know. They substituted brains and brawn for cash in getting what they wanted -- a summer cottage on a lovely Vermont lake. They started with just enough money to build the bare structure of the cottage; nothing left over for paint or furnishing.

But the cottage was built and painted and furnished. And here's how: The two older boys, aged 15 and 13, did some of the carpentry work and plumbing installation, thus cutting down building expenses by nearly a hundred dollars. These savings were used to buy paint, draperies, chairs, and kitchen utensils.

That wasn't all. The lumber order was closely calculated. There were no long boards left over. But the boys managed to save many short pieces that couldn't be used in the frame, partitions, floors, or siding.

Out of these odds and ends they made a lot of built-in conveniences: Five dressers, consisting of shelves, which were later draped with cretonne or gingham to match curtains and bedspreads in each room; book shelves for the living-room; two corner benches for the porch; small wall brackets for lamps in every room; square shelves for the phonograph and records; a rack for saucepan lids above the stove; a knife rack; a tool closet and a screened food closet on the back porch.

The experience of this family gives point to the comments of the men of the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering who have been assembling practical plans for building and remodeling farm houses. They say that built-ins can be used in any room of the house, either as permanent features or as temporary furnishing. Here are some of their specific recommendations for built-ins. First, in the bed-rooms. Dressing tables are easy. They are just broad shelves braced against the wall at a suitable height, covered with a gathered or pleated flounce. A window seat will provide further storage room and a place to sit. The frame of the bedstead may be home-built, like Thomas Jefferson's, at Monticello. The mattress usually rests on heavy ropes, laced across. Covered wagon pioneers made many a built-in bed of this kind, because they carried so little furniture with them. Among the farm house plans is one for a house with bunks built in so as to give each boy in a large family a small place of his very own.

Another plan for a farm house embodies a good space-saving idea for a small bed-room with a dormer window. A window seat is built under the dormer, and on each side, three drawers are set into the wall under the eaves. For a school boy or school girl this room might be equipped with a wide hinged shelf with pull-out legs to serve as a desk.

Sometimes additional closets are needed. Inside they may have rods for hangers, shelves or racks for shoes, sliding trays for clothing, compartments for hats, shoe shining outfits, and even a dressing table with a mirror.

In the kitchen, the handy man about the house can often add a counter or working surface that does instead of a table; a sliding or drop shelf; a cupboard or cabinet for special needs -- to store bulky equipment out of the way, equipment such as electric utensils, serving trays, large platters, and vases. A good home carpenter can design a cabinet with different sized spaces to hold all these different pieces.

Other kitchen built-ins include such items as a rack for saucepan lids, within arm's reach of the stove. A knife rack saves blade edges and prevents cut fingers. Drainboards make dishwashing easier. A two-way or pass closet between the kitchen and dining-room can sometimes be made by cutting the back wall of an ordinary closet. The shelves run right through, ending alongside the sink or counter on the kitchen side. Then when dishes are washed they are put away without taking any extra steps. When it's time to set the table for the next meal, you take them out on the dining-room side.

For the kitchen where laundry work is done, a built-in ironing board with a hinged support saves space and adds convenience.

If the cook stove is wood-burning, an excellent kitchen built-in is a wood-box that can be filled from outside and have its contents reached from inside.

Building in a breakfast nook requires only the construction of a table surface and two long benches to sit on, with lockers underneath them. The table may rest on a sawbuck type of base and be made to tilt; it may be very simply constructed with four straight legs, or it may be hinged to the wall at one end and fold up.

Built-in dish closets and corner cupboards are decorative and useful in the dining-room. So is a built-in sideboard or dresser of the Welsh type, displaying some of the old family dishes or pewter.

The chief built-in for the living-room is of course a set of bookshelves. Such shelves need not necessarily be for books. They may be curtained and take care of magazines, papers, sheet music, records, games, or toys. The folding desk idea might be adopted in a small living-room. Another suggestion is a pair of fireside benches or "settles." Most built-ins, you will notice, provide storage space as well as sitting or working surface.

There you have some of the ideas for built-in furniture advanced in the plans for remodeling old and building new farm houses that have been compiled by the agricultural engineers of the United States Department of Agriculture.

